Aleksandr Dugin (b. 1962) is perhaps best known as the leading exponent in contemporary Russia of Eurasianism, an increasingly fashionable political doctrine, referred to by scholars such as Marlène Laruelle as “neo-Eurasianism.” He is also, however, one of Russia’s leading exponents of Traditionalism, a school of thought of early twentieth-century French origin which might be classed as a philosophy, but has occult roots and is usually seen by scholars as a form of esotericism. A form of Traditionalism that is both distinctively Soviet and distinctively Russian, this article will argue, lies at the heart of Dugin’s politics. This form of Traditionalism is, in important ways, a continuation into the post-Soviet era of one aspect of Soviet civilization, occult dissident culture. Dugin and his activities are generally regarded with alarm in some circles in Russia and the West, where he is regarded as a dangerous “neo-fascist.” Whether or not the Dugin phenomenon is dangerous, and if so to whom, are questions this article will not address. Neither will it address the relationship between the Dugin phenomenon and neo-fascism.

The Dugin phenomenon

Since 1967, Aleksandr Dugin has been involved in what is at first sight a bewildering array of groups and positions, starting at the margins of Russian political and intellectual life, and becoming ever more prominent. The “Dugin phenomenon,” however, becomes comprehensible if analyzed on three levels: the public, the political, and the intellectual.¹

Dugin is at present most widely known in Russia at the public level, as a frequent commentator on foreign (and sometimes domestic) affairs in the Russian media. The fall of the Berlin wall was “a shameful event” for Russia, Dugin tells km.ru.² The West is using “new ways of trying to impose their vision

¹ My thanks to Mischa Gabowitsch for suggesting this approach to the analysis of Dugin.
² Sergei Makarov, “Krushenie Berlinskoi steny kak tragediia Rossii,” Km.ru November 9, 2009, news.km.ru/krushenie_berlinskoy_steny_kak_t.
of a unipolar world on all humanity,” he tells ITAR-TASS.³ Protest rallies in Moldova have been organized by the USA, he explains in Komsomol’skaia pravda.⁴ At this public level, Dugin’s views and comments are plentiful, but not especially remarkable. They might be described as Great Russian nationalist, anti-American, or Soviet-imperial nostalgic, positions that have become increasingly common in recent years. There is much more to Dugin’s views than this, however.

At the political level, Dugin is at present the leader of the Eurasian Movement, and thus the leading spokesman for Eurasianism, a political philosophy which promotes Eurasian solidarity against the Atlantic world, and which thus fits well with currently fashionable nationalist and anti-American positions. Its declared objective is “to draw people together to work for prosperity and peace throughout the [Eurasian] continent, to build and care for our common Eurasian home.”⁵

The Eurasian Movement, established in 2001, is the successor, as Dugin’s main organizational vehicle, of the National Bolshevik Party (NBP), which he established in 1993 with the novelist Éduard Limonov (b. 1943) and the musician Egor Letov (1964–2008),⁶ but left in 1998 as a result of various disappointments, and a split with Limonov (Letov was never particularly active).⁷ The central political positions of the Eurasian Movement and the NBP organizations are quite different, as is their status. In other ways, however, they are quite similar.

The NBP was defined more by what it stood against—President Yeltsin’s Russia and the liberalism that was then popular—than by what it stood for. It was colorful, but marginal.⁸ The Eurasian Movement is defined by what it stands for, and is loyal to today’s Kremlin, with which it seems to enjoy good relations.⁹ It includes such establishment figures as the television journalist

⁶ Of Grazhdanskaia Oborona (Civil Defense).
⁷ The NBP under Limonov has since taken very different directions.
⁹ Many rumors circulate concerning these. The central point, however, is that Dugin could hardly enjoy his current public prominence without some significant support in the Kremlin.
The Case of Aleksandr Dugin

Mikhail Leont’ev and Mufti Talgat Taj al-Din. It also differs from the NBP in having branches (some more important than others) in the West. The Eurasian Movement resembles the NBP, however, in attracting activist youth, though to the Eurasian Youth Union rather than the Eurasian Movement proper, in Russia and in the former Soviet space. Members of the Eurasian Youth Union have engaged in a variety of “direct actions” outside Russia, ranging from destruction of a Ukrainian national symbol to paramilitary activities on Russia’s fringes, such as Transnistria and South Ossetia. The Eurasian Youth Union, then, continues the activist traditions of the old NBP, and despite differences in central political positions, the Eurasian Movement stands, as the NBP stood, against American-style liberalism.

At the intellectual level, Dugin is at present a professor of sociology at Moscow State University, where he is director of the Center for the Study of Conservatism and editor of the Center’s journal, Russian Time (Russkoe vremia, since 2009). The Center is in a sense an organizational vehicle, but is more a forum for the promulgation of Dugin’s intellectual positions, and in this sense is the immediate successor to a lecture series called the “New University,” to individual lectures given to members of the NBP before that, and ultimately to lectures given by Dugin to members of Pamiat’ in 1987, discussed below. The journal is the successor of Dear Angel (Milyi Angel), Dugin’s first journal, es-

15 For these lectures, Dugin, interview, Moscow, August 1999.
tablished in 1991, and to *Elements (Ėlementy)*, established in 1993. These journals were and are supplemented by a number of major websites, well designed and with copious archives, that carry many of Dugin’s articles as well as videos of his more recent lectures. The topics treated and authors referred to in all these lectures, journals and websites have developed over the years, but have not changed fundamentally, and contain significant esoteric content. The intellectual level of the Dugin phenomenon, then, shows the greatest continuity over the years.

Dugin has published 28 books between 1990 and 2010, some of which are collections of his lectures. These can be allocated to both the political and the intellectual levels, but not to the public level, as none are aimed at a mass readership. The book which first brought him to serious public attention in 1997, *Geopolitical Foundations: The Geopolitical Future of Russia (Osnovy geopolitiki: geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii)*, for example, belongs to the political level, and contains little that is properly esoteric. Other books, however, belong to the intellectual level, for example *The Metaphysics of the Gospel (Metafizika blagoi vesti, 1996)* and *The Philosophy of Traditionalism (Filosofia traditsionalizma, 2002)*, and contain much that is esoteric.

The relationship between these three levels of the Dugin phenomenon might in theory be that the public creates the political, and that the political creates the intellectual. However, given that the intellectual has remained consistent over the years while the political has changed somewhat and the public has changed even more (from slight visibility at the margins to definite visibility in the mainstream), it makes more sense to understand the intellectual as giving rise to the political, and the political to the public.

This is Dugin’s own understanding of the relationship. After a period of “ultimate despair” in the 1980s, he has written, events (evidently those attending the collapse of the Soviet Union) led him to the conclusion that political and public action was necessary for the sake of the intellectual or, as he put it, that “it was necessary to strengthen the Traditionalist spirit, to clarify metaphysical positions, to consolidate the forces that could—intentionally or not—defend the sacred.” The “Traditionalist spirit” (which will be explained below) and metaphysical positions relate to the intellectual level, and are where the esoteric is to be found. The consolidation of forces relates to the political

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16 For these journals, see Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 233.
17 At present, the most important are Arktogea (arcto.ru), Informatsionno-analiticheskii portal Evraziia (evrazia.org) and the MSU site (konservatizm.org).
and public levels, where the esoteric is not so central, and where others may serve Dugin’s intellectually defined objectives “intentionally or not.”

This article, therefore, understands the intellectual—including the esoteric—as the basis of the political and the public, and so will focus on the intellectual. It will now examine the origins of Dugin’s former despair, and then the Traditionalist metaphysics from which his conception of the sacred derives.

Dugin’s despair: The Iuzhinskii Circle as a Soviet phenomenon

Dugin’s despair was of Soviet origin. Dugin was born in 1962, allegedly into the Soviet nomenklatura as the son of a general in the GRU (military intelligence). At the age of 18, however, he encountered occult dissident culture in the form of the “Iuzhinskii Circle,” so-called because it originally met in an apartment in Iuzhinskii Lane. The Iuzhinskii Circle was an informal group that had been established in the 1960s by the poet Evgenii Golovin (1938–2010), the novelist Iurii Mamleev (b. 1931), and a graduate of the Moscow Institute of Philosophy, Vladimir Stepanov. By 1980, when Dugin entered the circle, Mamleev had emigrated to America, and Golovin no longer attended much; leadership had passed to Stepanov. It is not clear that it was still referred to as the Iuzhinskii Circle at this point, but the label is anyhow used in this article, since no better label is available.

The Iuzhinskii Circle had originally been established in search of all forms of occult knowledge, starting with yoga and Sufism, but had gradually come to concentrate on the work of Georgii Gurdjieff (1866 [?]–1949), the Greek-Armenian who, after an early career in the Russian Empire, had emigrated to Paris and there established one of the most enigmatic and important alternative religious movements of the twentieth century. The Iuzhinskii Circle was not, however, an “authentic” Gurdjieff group, which, as Arkady Rovner argues, would have been impossible in “the environment of cultural isolation of Soviet

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20 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Although much has been written on Gurdjieff, there is still no good scholarly history of this movement.
Russia.” It, like other such occult dissident groups, necessarily developed its understandings on the basis of the limited material its members could find (normally in the Lenin Library), often developing this material in idiosyncratic ways. Its interpretation of the Gurdjieff “work” was somewhat different from that known at Gurdjieff’s own Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man outside Paris, for example, and included a strong emphasis on the use of “shock,” “tests” of obedience (such as going out for a week wearing one brown shoe and one black one), and prolonged bouts of drunkenness—including, allegedly, a party for Golovin’s birthday that lasted for five months.

By the time that Dugin joined the circle, “excess in all forms” had become the norm, according to Dugin also a form of revolt. As well as the consumption of significant quantities of alcohol, this excess included sexual experimentation. Dugin’s first wife, Evgeniia Debrianskaia (b. 1953), whom he met in the Iuzhinskii Circle, was later one of two co-founders of the Association of Sexual Minorities, which became the Moscow Gay and Lesbian Union. Excess, however, was matched by serious discussion and by reading, carried out in a variety of languages, which members of the circle often taught themselves. Dugin, for example, is an accomplished linguist, said to read nine or ten languages.

Dugin’s encounter with occult dissident culture in the form of the Iuzhinskii Circle changed his life in several ways. Its immediate effect was to turn him into a dissident, one of those arrested by the KGB in 1983 after a party in a painter’s studio during which he had sung what he describes as “mystical anti-Communist songs.” As a result, he was expelled from the Institute of Aviation, where he had been studying. For some years after this he worked as a street sweeper. Another effect was to introduce him to people with whom he would

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24 Rovner, “Gurdzhievskoe dvizhenie.”
27 Dugin, interview, Moscow, August 1999.
29 Dugin, interview, 1999.
30 Nine languages according to Dugin’s entry in the Russian Wikipedia (accessed March 7, 2010), and ten according to an earlier version of his biography, www.evrazia.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1882 (accessed November 11, 2006). As well as Russian, he certainly knows French and English very well, and evidently also German, though I have not interviewed him in German.
31 Dugin, interview, 1999.
remain in contact until today, including Gaidar Dzhemal (b. 1947), with whom Dugin took his first political steps during the closing years of the Soviet Union, when both men joined Pamiat’, the first non-Party mass political organization in Soviet history, and one opposed to perestroika.\textsuperscript{32} Dzhemal, like Golovin and Mamleev, lectured for Dugin’s “New University” in the late 1990s and early 2000s,\textsuperscript{33} despite by then having adopted political positions that were different from Dugin’s. Dzhemal, for example, became one of Russia’s best known Islamists, and despite an early interest in Traditionalism, no longer describes himself as a Traditionalist.\textsuperscript{34}

The most important effect on Dugin of the Iuzhinskii Circle, however, was to introduce him to a wide range of occult writers and thought. These, the origin of Dugin’s Traditionalist metaphysics, and thus of his political and public positions, will be considered below.

The Iuzhinskii Circle, the location of Dugin’s “ultimate despair” and of his discovery of the metaphysics that would remain central to the fundamental intellectual level of his later activity, was a phenomenon characteristic of late Soviet culture. Circles of friends exist everywhere, but late-Soviet circles such as the Iuzhinskii Circle differed from those found elsewhere in two important respects: the talent and intellectual quality of their members, and their compactness and thus their significance for their members. Systems such as the contemporary Western one afford talented and clever people many opportunities for a variety of activities, with the result that such people tend to be busy, and so meet only occasionally, and do not generally form significant circles of close friends, at least after they leave university. Post-university circles, then, have little impact on them. The late Soviet system, in contrast, rewarded only certain types of talent, leaving other types of talent unoccupied, and thus providing unusually talented recruits for circles such as the Iuzhinskii Circle. The late Soviet system also ensured, through the activities of the state security apparatus, that such circles were compact. The Iuzhinskii Circle is reported by Rovner not to have been too worried about informers because of a conviction that “informers do not read [Jakob] Böhme.”\textsuperscript{35} This was probably true, but isolating the Circle from all those who did not read Böhme necessarily resulted in a high bar to entry. Circles of friends in systems without an intrusive security apparatus have lower bars to entry, and so are less compact. The late Soviet circle,

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} List of lectures at nu.evrazia.org/archives, accessed February 21, 2010.
\textsuperscript{34} Dzhemal, interview, Moscow, January 2006.
\textsuperscript{35} Rovner, “Gurdzhievskoe dvizhenie.”
then, was an instance of a very special social formation, similar to a religious sect. One characteristic of a sect is that it is of great significance for its members’ lives. Another is that the mental world within it tends to develop with little reference to society in general, and so—unrestrained—can easily go in unusual and surprising directions.

The Iuzhinskii Circle was also a distinctly late-Soviet phenomenon because of its eclecticism—the very wide variety of occult and esoteric writings in which it was interested. Esoteric groups in the West, for example, commonly follow one particular line. Western followers of Gurdjieff generally read Gurdjieff, P. D. Ouspensky, and other writers of the “Fourth Way.” They do not generally read the Traditionalist writers whom Dugin encountered via the Iuzhinskii Circle, as in the West the two movements do not overlap. To the extent that they do have any relations, those relations are generally hostile. In late Soviet Russia, however, only some of the works of the writers of the “Fourth Way” were available. The Lenin Library did not intentionally stock esoteric or occultist works in foreign languages, and had a somewhat random collection of them. Anything that could be found, then, was valuable, was read, and was discussed, not only in the Iuzhinskii Circle but also in the wider group of readers in the Lenin Library who were interested in the occult. Many of these knew each other, and met and talked there; Rovner describes such readers as almost living in the Lenin Library. Dugin remains remarkably eclectic to this day, and this eclecticism is a continuation of Soviet occult dissident culture.

One further way in which the Iuzhinskii Circle was a phenomenon characteristic of late Soviet culture was the prior intellectual formation of its members. Though all were clever and talented—Jakob Böhme is not easy reading, after all—few if any were trained in the rigorous application of critical and analytic skills. Dugin, for example, was almost entirely self-taught: he received no formal higher education in the humanities. The doctorate that later allowed him to become a professor of sociology was awarded in 2004 by the Rostov

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36 For a recent successful application of the sociology of the sect to the analysis of the political, see Marc Sageman, Understanding Terror Networks (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

37 Rovner, interview.

38 He has also incorporated Herman Wirth (1885–1981) into his Traditionalism, which no Western Traditionalist has. Filoşofiia tradicionalizma, 135–165. Wirth does not, however, seem to have had a major impact on Dugin’s final conceptions.
Institute of Law in Rostov-on-Don,\textsuperscript{39} not one of Russia’s leading academic institutions. Although others in the Iuzhinskii Circle had received higher education, Soviet higher education did not encourage the questioning and critical analysis that are the marks of a good education in the humanities in the West.

There was also a difference between the scope of acceptable knowledge in the late Soviet Union and the West. One of the standard definitions of “esoteric” used by social scientists is, of course, “rejected knowledge.”\textsuperscript{40} Such definitions are usually followed by examples that illustrate the rather narrow scope of rejected knowledge in the West: the study of flying saucers is often given.\textsuperscript{41} The scope of rejected knowledge in the Soviet Union, however, was rather wider. Esoteric authors were not just in the same category as flying saucers, but in the same category as Adam Smith and Isaiah Berlin.

This is one explanation for a striking difference between the reception of occult and esoteric works in the Iuzhinskii Circle—and indeed in Russia as a whole—and in comparable environments in the West. In the West, esoteric and occultist writers are not taken seriously in mainstream intellectual life, while in Russia they may be. This is partly a question of fashion—it is hard otherwise to explain why René Guénon (discussed below) is not acceptable in the footnotes of Western academic papers, though Mircea Eliade and Frantz Fanon are—but it is also a question of Soviet circumstances: less training in intellectual rigor and critical skills, and a far wider scope of “rejected knowledge.”

Late Soviet circumstances, then, encouraged the formation of circles such as the Iuzhinskii Circle, and determined their nature. In contrast to Western norms, such circles collected more talent, were more compact (and so more sectarian) but also more eclectic. If they had much higher barriers to entry for individuals than the Western norm, they also had much lower barriers to entry for ideas, partly by necessity, and partly as a consequence of the prior intellectual preparation of their members and partly as a consequence of the wider scope of “rejected knowledge.”


\textsuperscript{41} For example, by Michael Barkun, “Conspiracy Theories as Stigmatized Knowledge: The Basis for A New Age Racism?”, in Nation and Race: The Developing Euro-American Racist Subculture, Jeffrey Kaplan, Tore Bjorgo, eds. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 62.
Dugin’s metaphysics: Traditionalism as a Western phenomenon

The single most important writer Dugin encountered through the Iuzhinskii Circle was René Guénon (1886–1951), whose work had been introduced to the Circle—along with that of another Traditionalist, Julius Evola (1897–1974)—by Stepanov. Guénon was, Dugin wrote in 2002, “the most important man of the twentieth century.”42 Students at Moscow State University who took Dugin’s course on the sociology of Russian society in 2009 found five books by Guénon and four books by Evola on their readings lists, along with more standard titles by Émile Durkheim, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Jean Baudrillard.43

René Guénon is the founder of the Traditionalist movement.44 His early career in Paris during the belle époque was typical of activities in the esoteric milieux of his time. As a young man, he joined the Martinist Order of “Papus,” Gérard Encausse (1865–1916). This was a quasi-Masonic order which derived ultimately from the Theosophical Society, and enjoyed considerable—if brief—success, mostly in France, but also in late-imperial Russia.45 After the First World War, Guénon distanced himself from these milieux, became a severe critic of the occultism of the period, and attracted Roman Catholic patronage. He continued to develop various ideas of esoteric origin, notably perennialism (discussed below), and so lost Catholic patronage. He later dismissed contemporary Christianity as esoterically bankrupt. His mature philosophy was expressed in several books, many articles by him and his followers, and a long-running journal, Études traditionnelles.

There are three crucial elements in Traditionalism. Taken individually, none of these are unique to Traditionalism; what is unique is their combination. The first and most widespread element is perennialism, a belief in the existence of a single original Ur-religion known as the Tradition, from which Traditionalism takes its name. This perennial Tradition is a major theme in Western esotericism. It dates back to the work of Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) and Agostino Steuco (1497–1548) at the time of the Renaissance, and is found thereafter not only in occultist and esoteric writings, but also in the more

42 Dugin, Filosofia traditsionalizma, 21
43 Reading list, konservatizm.org/konservatizm/sociology/060909141416.khhtml (accessed February 22, 2010).
44 This summary and subsequent summaries are drawn from the first chapters of Sedgwick, Against the Modern World.
45 Marie-Sophie André, Christophe Beaufils, Papus, biographie, la Belle époque de l’occultisme (Paris: Berg international, 1995), 171.
mainstream work of the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716).\textsuperscript{46} The second element is a conviction that progress is an illusion, and that the real dynamic of history is relentless decline. Modernity is the lowest stage of decline, when the Tradition has been almost entirely lost. Traditionalism, then, is fiercely anti-modernist. The third element is a conviction that something can and should be done about this, either by following a traditional esoteric path within a traditional exoteric framework—Guénon’s solution—or by spiritually motivated political activity—Evola’s solution. For Guénon, the model was the \textit{brahmin} priest, and for Evola, the model was the \textit{kshatriya} spiritual warrior. Evola is sometimes described as a fascist, but was never a member of the Fascist Party, which he saw as insufficiently radical, and with which he was sometimes in conflict.

By the start of the Second World War, Guénon had moved to Egypt and converted to Islam, the exoteric framework within which he pursued the esoteric, Sufism. His followers by then included French Freemasons, European Sufis, and Rightists in Italy and Romania, inspired also by Evola. After the end of the Second World War and Guénon’s death, these streams diverged. There is relatively little information about Traditionalist Freemasons. Several groups of Traditionalist Sufis came into being, none of which were large but some of which were influential, given that their members were often persons of importance in European and American cultural and intellectual life. Traditionalist Rightism developed most in Italy where, during the 1970s, the works of Evola became the chief inspiration for activists who were at one point responsible for an average of 80 terrorist incidents a month.\textsuperscript{47}

As an anti-modernist philosophy, Traditionalism has most appeal to those with problematic experiences of modernity. In the West, it has generally appealed to intellectuals whose understanding of modernity has led them to disenchantment with it and alienation from it. In the Islamic world, it has more general appeal in Turkey and Iran, the two countries with the most problematic experiences of modernity: Turkey because Kemalist modernity is simultaneously nationalist and in opposition to Turkey’s cultural and historical past, and Iran both because the Shah’s modernity was similarly in opposition to Iran’s culture and recent history, and because of the problematic experience of the disappointing consequences of the Islamic Revolution. In the Arab world,


\textsuperscript{47} There were some 2,000 incidents in 1977. It can be assumed that half of them were the work of Rightists.
where experience of modernity has been much more superficial, Traditionalism is popular only in limited circles, notably among the Moroccan Franco-phone elite—which, of course, has its own problematic experience of modernity.48

The Soviet Union in some ways defined modernity, and Russia’s experience of that modernity was certainly problematic. Guénon condemned modernity for its loss of the sacred, its cult of the technical sciences, and its illusory cult of progress. Nowhere was the loss of the sacred more dramatic than in the officially atheist Soviet Union, and nowhere else were the two substitute cults of science and progress more assiduously advanced, and nowhere else was the cult of progress more obviously illusory. Guénon condemned the materialism that underlay modern life; in the Soviet Union, materialism was not an underlying factor that was visible only to those who looked carefully, as it was in France, but rather a major and official part of the dominant world view. In one of his most important books, *The Reign of Quantity*, Guénon contrasted the “modern” emphasis on quantity, with its attendant atomization, and the “traditional” emphasis on quality, understood in a metaphysical sense.49 Quantity (in this sense, not in the sense of abundance) rather than quality was characteristic of Soviet life, again perhaps more than anywhere else.

One of Traditionalism’s major points of appeal has always been its condemnation of modernity. Traditionalism has always had limited appeal in the West, because Guénon’s characterization of modernity corresponds so little to most Westerners’ experience of modernity that it can easily seem a caricature. For those with experience of Soviet modernity, however, Traditionalism could very easily seem to present an entirely accurate analysis.

**Traditionalism as a Russian phenomenon**

Traditionalism in Russia followed two lines of development, one unusual (in international terms) under Dugin, and one more usual under Iurii Stefanov (1939–2001) and then Artur (Arsenii) Medvedev (1968–2009). This second line is a post-Soviet development, and so does not show the influence of Soviet occult dissident culture. The differences between the first and second lines, then, are instructive.

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48 These observations, like some of those following, are distilled from the relevant sections of Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*.

Stefanov discovered Guénon in the Library of Foreign Languages,\(^{50}\) rather as Stepanov discovered him in the Lenin Library, but was a well-regarded translator of French literature, not a dissident, and not a member of a circle such as the Iuzhinskii Circle. Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Stefanov published a number of articles on Guénon in the journal *Questions of Philosophy* (*Voprosy filosofii*), a serious philosophical journal published by the Russian Academy of Sciences but with a somewhat wider readership than such journals normally have. A number of Russian intellectuals who read this journal became interested in Traditionalism, including Artur Medvedev, then a young history graduate from the Russian State Humanities University. After Stefanov’s death, Medvedev became Russia’s most prominent non-political Traditionalist,\(^{51}\) as founder and editor of the journal *Magic Mountain* (*Volshebnaia gora*), which has published one or two issues each year since 1993,\(^ {52}\) each containing around 300 pages.

*Magic Mountain* acts as a focus for non-political Russian Traditionalism, following a pattern well established in the West, where Guénon’s own journal *Études traditionnelles* formed the initial focus for the development of Traditionalism, and where similar journals have been established in every country where Traditionalism has become established.\(^ {53}\) Like its Western equivalents, *Magic Mountain* contains translations of classic Traditionalist texts, translations of classic non-Traditionalist spiritual writers such as Mullah Sadra, new articles, and book reviews. Most of the new articles are by Russian or Russian-speaking Traditionalists, but *Magic Mountain* also translates articles by contemporary Western Traditionalists, linking Russian Traditionalism with that elsewhere.\(^ {54}\) Medvedev estimated that over the years he has published some 200

\(^{50}\) Artur Medvedev, interview, Moscow, January 2006.

\(^{51}\) This article uses “non-political Traditionalist” in the sense in which I use “spiritual Traditionalist” in *Against the Modern World*.

\(^{52}\) Medvedev, interview. Where no other source is given, information on Medvedev and his group comes from Medvedev. This journal, named after Thomas Mann’s novel, was initially intended to be a literary and philosophical publication, a summit where intellectuals of various persuasions might meet, but from its second issue it became increasingly Traditionalist.

\(^{53}\) In 2010 there are similar journals in several languages, of which the most important are *Connaissance des religions* and *La Règle d’Abraham* (in French), *Sophia* and *Sacred Web* (in English, published in the United States and Canada, respectively), *Symbolos* and *Revista de Estudios Tradicionales* (in Spanish, published in Spain and Argentina, respectively), and *Rivista di Studi Tradizionali* (in Italian, 1961–2003).

\(^{54}\) Comments based on a review is issues 9 to 11 of *Volshebnaia gora*. The Western authors do not always know they are being translated (I myself did not at the time).
different authors. Medvedev did not in general accept purely political articles, but did publish Golovin and some followers of Dugin and Dzhemal.

The non-political Traditionalist circle around *Magic Mountain* also resembles Western models with regard to the type of person who contributes to it, though perhaps with a heavier than usual emphasis on poets and academics, probably as a result of the lower bar to entry for ideas into Russian intellectual life noted above. Like non-political Traditionalists in the West, many of *Magic Mountain*’s authors also publish books on various subjects which are not Traditionalist, but in which Traditionalist perspectives are reflected.

Post-Soviet Russia, then, provides conditions in which Traditionalism can flourish in much the same way that it has flourished in the West. Where the *Magic Mountain* circle differs from Western models, however, is that it is not associated with a Sufi order or any other distinct spiritual community. In the West, such groups normally follow Guénon’s example in matching their intellectual interests with spiritual activity, most frequently in the form of a Sufi order, but sometimes also in the form of a Masonic lodge. This is not the case for either line of Russian Traditionalism, that associated with *Magic Mountain* or that associated with Dugin. Only very few Russian Traditionalists have converted to Islam over the years, and they have in general have been drawn to Shi’ism rather than Sufism, largely as a result of the influence of Dugin’s associate from the Iuzhinskii Circle, Dzhemal, who is himself Shi’i.

Both Dugin and Medvedev explain this difference between Russian and Western Traditionalism in terms of Russian Orthodoxy. According to Medvedev, Stefanov was interested in Kabbalah and Gnosticism, but always saw himself as an Orthodox Christian. Similarly, the spiritual consequences for Medvedev himself of his encounter with Guénon and Stefanov were that he began regular Orthodox Christian practice (at baptism he assumed the name Arsenii). Dugin too follows Orthodox Christian practice, though as an Old Believer, of the Edinoverie. He argues in *Metaphysics of the Gospel* that the

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55 Medvedev, interview.
56 Dzhemal, for example, first published what is generally considered his most important spiritual work-- *Orientatsia Sever* (now available at kitezh.onego.ru/nord) – in *Volshebnaia gora*. These comments are based on a review of the tables of contents of several issues, and discussions with Medvedev about the various authors.
58 Ali Turgiev, interview, Moscow, January 2006.
59 Medvedev, interview.
60 Vladimir Karpiets, interview, Moscow, January 2006. Edinoverie, unlike most varieties of Old Believer, recognizes the authority of the Patriarch, and is in return recognized by the mainstream
Christianity that Guénon rejected was Western Catholicism. Guénon was right in rejecting Catholicism, Dugin argues, but wrong in rejecting Eastern Orthodoxy, of which he knew little. Orthodoxy, unlike Catholicism, had never lost its initiatic validity and so remains a valid tradition to which a Traditionalist may turn.61

This emphasis on Russian Orthodoxy is the one way in which both lines of Russian Traditionalism differ from Western norms, and the explanation seems to be Russian (rather than Soviet). This is suggested partly by the fact that it is common to Dugin’s Soviet-era Traditionalism and to Magic Mountain’s post-Soviet Traditionalism, and partly by parallels outside Russia. Traditionalist Sufism is also unknown in Turkey, where its absence is explained by the abundance of pre-existing non-Traditionalist Sufi orders,62 and in Iran, where Sufism has a different history, and where the absence of Traditionalist Sufism63 is explained by the abundance of pre-existing alternative expressions of Islamic esotericism.64 In the West, pre-existing Catholic alternatives have attracted only a tiny handful of Traditionalists, and pre-existing Protestant alternatives have attracted none. There have been a number of Traditionalists in the West who have turned to Christianity rather than Sufism, but in its Russian or Greek Orthodox forms. One of these, the French writer Jean Biès (b. 1933), has made much the same arguments as Dugin, and was evidently a source for the first version of Dugin’s The Metaphysics of the Gospel.65 The implication seems to be, then, that Western Traditionalists create Traditionalist Sufi orders because they cannot find a pre-existing religious practice that satisfies them, but that when a satisfactory esoteric religious practice does already exist—in Turkey, Iran, and evidently also in Russia—this need does not arise. The substitution of Russian Orthodoxy for Sufism, then, reflects Russian conditions.
Dugin’s Eurasianism as a post-Soviet phenomenon

Traditionalism, then, is of Western origin, but its unusual emphasis on Russian Orthodoxy is of Russian origin. The Magic Mountain circle is of post-Soviet origin, and in other respects close to Western Traditionalist norms. Dugin’s Traditionalism, in contrast, differs from those norms, and reflects the characteristically late-Soviet circumstances of the Iuzhinskii Circle.

The distance between Dugin’s Traditionalism and Western norms were justified by Dugin in his 2002 Filosofiia traditsionalizma. In the first chapter of this book, Dugin argues that what Guénon really developed was a form of language, a “meta-language”—in fact, though Dugin does not use the word, a sort of dialectic. Guénon’s distinction between modernity and tradition is, Dugin argues, as fundamental as Marx’s distinction between labor and capital, but “even more fundamental, even more radical.” Guénon’s dialectic has to be used, however, not merely repeated, and Dugin is highly critical of Western Traditionalists for simply repeating Guénon with “very small deviations,” which he sees as “a kind of intellectual hobby” like stamp-collecting, or a form of sadomasochism. Dugin’s style, incidentally, sometimes shows something of the “literary shock tactics” found in Mamleev’s work, which Rovner ascribes to Gurdjieff.

Dugin argues instead for what he calls “Post-Guénonianism,” the application of Guénon’s dialectic to changing and developing circumstances, which is necessary since “the modern world is degrading. As a set of anomalies, it is going from bad to worse.” This application allows, for example, the realization that “Soviet or Chinese communism contains more elements of the language of Tradition (however paradoxical and contradictory in expression) than modern Protestant theology.” Post-Guénonianism is, according to Dugin, essential:

All the events around us (the crash of the ruble, military conflict, a government’s resignation, new discoveries in archeology) are the struggle between two opposing camps. One pole: a tiny Post-Guénonian camp, almost non-existent, like a grain of sand in the desert. The other: a giant liberal camp, the language of modernity, which claims global supremacy.

66 Dugin, Filosofiia traditsionalizma, 43.
67 Rovner, “Gurdzhievskoe dvizhenie.”
68 Dugin, Filosofiia traditsionalizma, 46.
69 Ibid., 49–50.
As a result:

Implementation of the Post-Guénonian program is the single main state, national, social and cultural challenge. We have only one author, who must be read: René Guénon. We have only one objective: to understand what he meant to do. His thinking is our way of thinking, his language is our language... Without this, any change of government, any disaster and any social changes (even if positive) are metaphysically zero, because without Post-Guénonianism there is no spirituality, no social justice, no life–nothing.70

The principle vehicle for the implementation of “the Post-Guénonian program” is his Eurasianism. Eurasianism was originally developed in Prague, Berlin and Paris during the early 1920s by Russian emigré intellectuals, notably the geographer Petr Savitskii, the linguist Prince Nikolai Trubetskoi, and Nikolai Alekseev, a legal philosopher,71 building on the nineteenth century Slavophiles and Pan-Slavists. The Slavophiles defined a Slavic identity by contrast with that of Europe, emphasizing the Slavs’ religion and social solidarity in contrast to the supposed dry rationality and moral decadence of Europe, drawing on Romantic critiques of early modernity.72 The Eurasians of the 1920s extended their criticisms of Europe, and replaced the Slavs with Eurasia, defined as Russia and the peoples of the Eurasian steppe.73 Dugin modified this definition of Eurasia in line with the work of two non-Russian interwar intellectuals, the British geographer Sir Halford Mackinder and the German geopolitical theorist Karl Haushofer, which pitted a “Eurasian heartland” consisting of Germany and Russia against an Atlantic world comprising maritime nations predisposed toward free trade and democratic liberalism.74

Dugin’s Traditionalism, which had already embraced Russian Orthodoxy, fitted well with this Eurasian-Atlantic model. Eurasia, as defined by Mackinder and Haushofer, and led by Russia, could be identified with Tradition and the sacred, building on the original Slavophile conception of the Slavic identity. The Atlantic world, in contrast, could be identified with decline, modernity, and the absence of spirituality, building on the original Slavophile conception

70 Ibid, 50.
72 For the Slavophils and Pan-Slavists, Laruelle, L’ideologie eurasiste russe, 34–39.
73 Ibid., 39.
74 Sedgwick, Against the Modern World, 226.
of an “other” characterized by dry rationality and moral decadence. The result of this combination was the geopolitical philosophy underlying Dugin’s 1997 *Geopolitical Foundations*, the book which—as has been noted—first drew public attention to him. The same geopolitical revision of Traditionalism forms the basic creed of the Eurasian Movement, which has been modified further to accommodate perspectives associated with the Western New Right, and especially with the French writer Alain de Benoist (b. 1943).75

One reason why *Geopolitical Foundations* and Dugin’s Eurasianism have enjoyed such success is that the definition of the opposing Atlantic and Eurasian blocs reflects well-established pre-Soviet Russian and, especially, Soviet models. The identification of America as the chief representative of modernity, and so as Russia’s chief adversary, is a comfortable continuation of Cold War realities. The Eurasian bloc is a continuation of the old Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, changed principally by Dugin’s inclusion of Iran and Turkey, a change in which Dugin follows a long-established trend, since Russian rulers from Catherine the Great to Stalin have seen these two countries as natural appendages to the Russian sphere.

Eurasianism provides, to those who want it, an ideological explanation of the continuation of a pattern of confrontation that has lost its original, Soviet-era ideological justification. It is also well adapted to post-Soviet conditions because of one feature it takes directly from Guénonian Traditionalism, the belief in the existence of a single original and perennial Ur-religion. This is an excellent basis for religious pluralism, and religious pluralism is urgently needed in post-Soviet Russia. One of the most popular forms of Russian nationalism has always been based in, or at least expressed in terms of, Orthodoxy. This, however, necessarily excludes Russia’s non-Orthodox inhabitants, and thus easily becomes a force towards fragmentation—the precise opposite of what most nationalists seek. Traditionalist perennialism, however, provides the solution. On the basis of a shared perennial truth, Dugin can easily include Muslims and Jews in his Eurasian Movement (as he does), and propose an Orthodox alliance with Muslim nations, whether former Soviet republics or neighboring states such as Iran and Turkey. The Eurasian approach to Jews is complex, welcoming “traditional” Jews while rejecting “cosmopolitan” ones, concerning whom established anti-Semitic discourse may be used.

This seems to be one reason for the adherence to the Eurasian Movement of Mufti Talgat Taj al-Din, the *shaykh al-Islam* of European Russia and Siberia,

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an office first established by Catherine the Great in 1789, and then re-established in 1942. Some of Taj al-Din’s views are close to perennialism, possibly for political reasons. He suggested in 1992, for example, that the Tartars’ pre-Islamic worship of Tengri (Tengriianstvo) should be regarded as an early form of monotheism, and was instrumental in the 1998 construction of a mosque adorned with stained-glass windows bearing the image of the cross and of the Star of David.\textsuperscript{76} Other reasons for Taj al-Din’s participation in the Eurasian movement include the characterization of Salafism (what he calls “Satanic Wahhabism”) as modernist which Dugin shares with most other Traditionalists, and Dugin’s anti-Americanism, which Taj al-Din shares. He announced after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, for example, that resistance to the Americans constituted jihad and was thus a religious duty. This caused some consternation in the Kremlin, which for a while boycotted him.\textsuperscript{77}

A further feature of Dugin’s Eurasianism that may be a response to post-Soviet conditions is its apocalypticism. All Traditionalists are apocalyptic in some sense, since the decline that they see as producing modernity is irreversible and marks the start of a new cycle. Dugin’s work (if not his public media pronouncements), however, has an unusually strong emphasis on the apocalypse, from the title of his 1997 hit radio program “Finis Mundi,” to remarks made in conversation.\textsuperscript{78} The reasons for this are not clear, but may well be related to Russia’s traumatic history since the collapse of the Soviet Union. As Dugin wrote in \textit{Geopolitical Foundations}, these events “are difficult to understand unless interpreted as a sign of the times, announcing the proximity of the climax.”\textsuperscript{79}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{78} For example, in January 2006, Dugin commented on the common ground between him and American Neo-Conservatives, and I suggested that his views were hardly likely to encourage good relations with them or with America. Dugin’s response was “You forget that I am an apocalyptic.”
\end{itemize}
Conclusion

Dugin’s public positions, then, may seem unremarkable, but are informed by political positions that are more remarkable, and which themselves derive from central intellectual positions of Western origin, modified partly in accordance with Russian and post-Soviet conditions, but still bearing the stamp of Soviet occult dissident culture. Soviet occult dissident culture produced the hothouse atmosphere of the Iuzhinskii Circle within which the young Dugin read an unusually eclectic variety of occultist works of Western origin, including Guénon and Evola. The intellectual preparation of the members of that Circle made such authors more acceptable than they would have been in the West, and the highly problematic Soviet version of modernity may have made them especially appealing.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, with access to both a wider range of sources and a wider public, Dugin developed his Soviet-era Traditionalism into post-Guénonian Eurasianism, bringing in pre-Soviet Russian elements such as the Eurasianism of the 1920s emigration and Russian Orthodox practice. The result was then adjusted to post-Soviet conditions by the definition of Eurasian and Atlantic blocs that reproduced the battle lines of the Cold War.

Dugin is also a product of Soviet culture in one other way: the extent to which he attributes power to ideas. When I first met Dugin, he described Guénon to me as “an undiscovered Marx,” borrowing (I later learned) from the French Traditionalist René Alleau. Soviet Marxism embodied the power of the idea, if not in quite the way that had originally been intended. Dugin’s belief in the potential power of another idea, in the power of correct analysis, is not without parallel outside Russia, but is still redolent of Soviet culture.

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80 Interview, Moscow, August 1999.